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SUBJECT Casey/Nicaragua

MARTIN AGRONSKY: Elizabeth, the CIA Director, Mr. Casey, had now said that he feels he was wrong in not having revealed more clearly and explicitly to the Senate committee in charge of oversight of CIA operations what they were doing in Central America, and specifically the mining by the CIA of the harbors off the coast of Nicaragua. Now, Senator Moynihan, who said he was going to resign as deputy chairman, apparently has been sufficiently mollified, so he's going to remain as deputy chairman, though he says he'll forgive but not forget.

Now, where are we now with the CIA, with the secrets and keeping those secrets secret from the Congress?

ELIZABETH DREW: I think it's pretty clear what happened, Martin, is that it was -- Mr. Casey was made to understand that he was about to lose it all if he didn't mollify the senators, and that this was probably more a tactical move. I don't know that he lost a lot of sleep at night over -- contrition over not having been, perhaps, more fully informative of the Senate committee. But people in the Senate and elsewhere said to him, "Look, you're about to lose a very important constituency up there. You'd better mend your fences." Particularly, some Republican senators said that. And so he went up and he said, "I'm sorry," which for him was a very big thing to do.

There's another sub-thing that was going on here having to do with some people not wanting Mr. Moynihan to give up that slot, fearing it would go to someone who might be more critical of the CIA.

So, there was a lot of dancing around. I'm not sure that anything terribly substantive took place.

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HUGH SIDEY: But let's also look at the other side of this. We've looked at it from Mr. Casey's standpoint.

Let me say flat-out that the mining of the harbors, as it was done, was wrong, obviously a bad decision. It had political fallouts.

[Confusion of voices]

SIDEY: But isn't it curious that the people who wanted to be informed were informed? Eddie Boland and the people in the House, they found out; that Senator Biden wanted to find out, and he got well briefed on it; and that the people that really made an effort, they picked up the subtle hints.

AGRONSKY: Why should there be subtle hints about something so important in terms of national policy?

SIDEY: Well, I'm not justifying Casey. I'm saying that he was wrong in this. But what I am saying is, what is the responsibility of the Congress in this? Those people...

AGRONSKY: What are you saying, if you don't do your homework, you can't complain?

SIDEY: I think it's always going to be the case that if they are not diligent and they do not ask and do not probe, that these things are going to happen. And there's a case where they could have found out had they worked at it. And they did not.

CARL ROWAN: Well, I agree with Hugh in this respect. I think Moynihan is doing a dance around the lily pads. This is what worries me about oversight. If you've got people there who aren't conscientious enough when they see hints like this to say, "What are you talking about? What are you doing?" they don't have any right to come up with any big dramatic resignations later, and then, after Casey apologizes, say, "I'll go back into this post."

So, you're right. There's a lot of blame here.

MARIANNE MEANS: The senators are ambivalent in their attitude toward it. I think they understand that they have a responsibility. But this is -- the CIA is engaged in distasteful business. And the politicians feel the same way toward it, I think, as the public does. And yet they realize it has to be done. So they just as soon not know too much.